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Expanding the Use of the Laboratory.
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The author reports on a project designed to help foreign students make the transition from special English to regular college English classes through expanded use of the language laboratory. The project, conducted at the University of Texas at El Paso in 1968 (in the spring and fall semesters), was set up specifically to provide additional training in listening to different voices, and to sharpen skills in note-taking and outlining in English classes. The first part of the research used students from the Freshman English course--one group of foreign students, and a control group of English-speaking freshmen. Fifteen-minute tapes were made on a variety of subjects by six professors and an outside visitor. The students could hear a tape twice in one 50-minute lab period. They took notes and outlined the taped lecture. Their notes, taken up after every lab session to avoid any copying, were supplemented by work in class. The teacher took the notes to class and the students were given their own notes to look over. They then kept them for use during a test on the tape--at which time they could see whether or not they had written down the things important for that test. This self evaluation led to improved skills. Commercial tapes and several other innovations were added in the second semester of research. The author feels the program's aims were accomplished. (AMM)

EXPANDING THE USE OF THE LABORATORY

In San Antonio at the T.E.S.O.L. convention last year, I learned that little was being done for the foreign students in research about the transition from special classes to regular classes. The interest of my collegues in research that I already had under way spurred me to separate one phase of my research from the total plan, work on it intensively, and be prepared to give results, at least tentative results, at this meeting.

The phase that I chose for concentrated work was the use of the laboratory as an aid in acquiring some of the skills needed in the transition. In choosing to use the laboratory, I had the advantage of an excellent laboratory set-up. The lab program was already running and already staffed. At this point may I interject the fact that throughout the entire project I received splendid cooperation from John West, head of the English Department, Renee Cantu, the laboratory instructor, and all of my colleagues.

The project was divided into two time periods. The first stage was conducted in the remaining months of the spring semester, 1968. The second period was the fall semester. The project was set up to accomplish specific aims. As I saw the problem at the time, the foreign student needed additional training in listening to different voices. Also he needed to sharpen his skills in note taking and in outlining in English.

For the first stage of the research, I used two classes of English 3102, the second half of Freshman English. One

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group was foreign students, the other a control group of regular freshmen.

Tapes were made by six professors chosen from the English and Modern Language departments and by one outside visitor. No effort was made to control their choice of subject. However, a time limit of 15 minutes was suggested. This enabled the student to hear the tape twice in a single lab period of 50 minutes. The student was to take notes and then outline the lecture.

The students' notes were taken up after every lab session in order to assure that each student did his own work and did not copy anyone else's notes. This precaution proved valuable and is one that I recommend. In order for the student to evaluate his own ability in note taking, the work in lab was supplemented by work in class. The lab hours provided the "listening time" and this was not repeated. Also, the lab provided time for the slower student to hear the tape as many times as he desired. The teacher took the notes to class and each student was given his own notes to look over. He then kept them for use during a test on the tape. In this way he could see, dramatically, whether or not he had written down the things important for that test. This self evaluation led to improved skills.

Having a control group proved valuable. Again the work in lab was supplemented in the classroom. An opaque projector was used to show the foreign students different

outlines of the tape by the control group for comparison with their own. Some of the problems encountered with the tapes had nothing to do with their being foreign students. Sometimes the problems stemmed from the lecture's having too many dates or its having too many names. A third problem was that the lecturer had not been properly prepared and wandered in his presentation. These are all problems that students face in college lectures. When the foreign students found out that others had trouble, too, it gave them more self- confidence. And, seeing--for the same tape-- short outlines that were excellent and long outlines that were also excellent gave them increased knowledge of the scope of outlining.

In the fall of 1968, the second period of research was begun. The base was enlarged in that two 3102 foreign sections used the program. In the spring I had ordered sixteen commercial tapes from English Language Services, Inc. but these had not arrived in time for use in the first stage of the program. In the second part of the project the commercial tapes were used, one each week, and the notes that the students took in lab were later used for tests, but not for outlining. The best of the lecture tapes were used again and six new tapes were made by professors of English or history. These were used for both note taking and outlining.

Several minor refinements were included. One professor used the board as he lectured. His notes on the board

were copied exactly, and the laboratory instructor puts them on the board when he plays the tape.

One of the commercial tapes contains a menu. This was copied and used with the tape and then later as a basis for original dialogs given in class by teams of two or three. In fact, additional uses of these tapes is limited only by the ingenuity of the instructor and the class time available for it.

The final section is the presentation of an evaluation of the program. This will be done in three steps: first, the fortuitous results; second, the opinions of the instructors involved; and, third, a rather detailed evaluation done by the students.

First, there is one set of good results for which I can not really claim credit--the fortuitous results. One of these was the content of tapes. By letting each person choose his own topic, we got some superb tapes. We have one on Folklore in the Southwest and one on The Typical Texan, both of which were extremely interesting to our students. We have two on authors, one on Hemmingway presented in a beautifully organized manner that is excellent for outlining and one on Faulkner by a man to whom Faulkner is "Uncle Bill" because his wife is related to Faulkner. These two authors were of great interest to our students because they had read selections by them. One of the history professors made his tape "In Search of a Footnote." His passion for accuracy has proved to be a good introduction to the research

paper assignment. Many others are equally noteworthy.

Another bit of luck--or could I claim "an educated guess"-- was the length of the tapes. This length not only proved manageable in the lab but also proved to be an excellent length for the concentration required.

One unlooked-for fringe benefit was the increased awareness, on the part of the lecturing professors, of the problems faced by the foreign students.

The instructors gave the entire program a resounding "Bravo." The lab instructor said that it was easier to have good discipline when they were listening to an interesting tape. Also, they had to concentratate because they took notes that had to be handed in. In addition, the program proved to have "snob appeal." Those who had not passed English 3101 and progressed to English 3102 could not listen to these tapes. According to the instructors, the program rekindled the students' interest and made it easier for them to fulfill the required number of laboratory hours. In fact, one tentative title I had for this paper was "Combatting Lab Fatigue."

The third step was testing the results with the students. Two detailed questionaires were given, one on the commercial tapes and one on the lecture tapes. While the validity of student reaction to long range value might be questionable, certainly the student was the best judge of the quality of the tapes. In this area our score was not perfect. When given a Yes - No choice about volume, the score on all tapes for all questionaires was: 76% said the volume was good, but 24% said

that the tapes were not loud enough. However, when given three choices about quality, Yes, Medium, and No, they noted the quality as good 48%, medium 52%, and not good 0%.

The students were also asked to give a specific rating to each tape they heard. This information is being used in improving the program this semester.

And, questionable though their judgement may be, the students were asked for opinions on the value of the tapes. The questionaires were designed so that answers could be checked and no identification was given so that the student could be absolutely honest. These are the results.

After a question about how many tapes he had taken notes on, the next question was: "Do you feel that this practice helped you learn how to take notes?" For the commercial tapes, the answers were Yes--88% and No--12%. For the lecture tapes, the percentage was the same: Yes--88% and No--12%.

When asked about tests on the tapes, 88% felt that the tests had helped them, while 12% felt that they had not. On outlining, 84% felt that they had been assisted in learning how to outline while 16% did not. Not every student, however, answered these last two questions.

For the question, "Do you feel that listening to the different voices will help you to understand different lecturers more easily in the future?" The answer was Yes--100%. All answered this question. This was the only 100% we got, but perhaps this endorsement is praise enough.

On the questionaire, space was provided for comments. As could be expected, some comments would be diametrically opposed. About the commercial tapes, one comment was: "In my country weights and measures are in the grams and meter system and having studied the pound and mile system I don't think tape 49 (Weights and Measures) is interesting to a class of foreign students." And another was: "Some are quite interesting, such as weather and weights and measures." Also about the commercial tapes, we received the following comments. "I think that most of the foreign students from Mexico already know what these tapes are about. So these tapes are not very interesting." Another comment: "Overall I believe that the tapes are very interesting and also that they provide you with practical suggestions for your future life. You get to know the ways of life in the U.S. or understand them better." And again: "These tapes have been helping me a lot, not only in my English pronunciation and idiomatic expressions but in adjusting to the American society."

The lecture tapes, aside from criticism of volume, received a great deal of praise. "It's very interesting to know how the different professors of the University think. And how hard they work to improve our English." "Lecture tapes are more interesting than commercial ones. They should be increased in time. I enjoyed the varieties of the tapes." "It was helpful in understanding different kinds of lectures." "They gave us some background about different subjects."

"By listening to these tapes I also learned to take notes more quickly." I'd like to quote more of the comments, but this one sums up most of what was said: "These tapes are very helpful to us because we listen to different voices and we learn how to take notes, and we learn some things that we didn't know."

Also, space was provided for suggestions for improvement. The most numerous suggestions concerned sound. This has already been indicated by the 24% who wanted the sound louder. Some of the suggestions concerned laboratory procedure, requesting more quiet and requesting that there be more monitoring of tapes. One request was made for the return of the notes taken on the tapes so that the student could keep a record of the information learned. Several suggested that we have more variety in topics and one specifically requested tapes in scientific fields. The suggestions were well thought out and we are already using some of them this spring.

To claim unqualified success would be false. We know of areas that need improvement and without a doubt, there are improvements needed that we haven't found yet. This whole program is a continuing challenge.

In conclusion, perhaps it would be valuable to recount some of the positive values. We have some excellent tapes for use now and in the future, and some of our professors are better informed about the problems our foreign students face. Also the instructors feel that the program aided in lab management and made it easier for the student to maintain

lab attendance. But, of utmost importance, it has seemed to accomplish the aims set at the beginning: to train the students to listen to different voices and to sharpen their skills in note taking and in outlining in English.

This paper has not been presented as an answer to our problems. It is a record of a search for answers. If it leads to new problems and new questions, all the work will have been worthwhile.

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